

# The Mardi Gras Mystery

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

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CHAPTER IX—Continued.

"Books be d-d!" snorted the chief, and leaned forward earnestly. "Look here, Fell! Do you believe in your heart that Maillard killed his father?"

Fell was silent a moment under that intent scrutiny.

"From the evidence, I am forced against my will to believe it," he said at last. "Of course, he'll be able to prove that he was not the Masquer on previous occasions; his alibi will take care of that. Up to the point of the murder, his story is all right. And, my friend, there is a chance—a very slim, tenuous chance—that his entire story is true. In that case, another person must have appeared as the Masquer, which seems unlikely."

"Or else," put in Ben Chacherre, smoothly, "the real original Masquer showed up!"

There was an instant silence. Ja-rain Fell regarded his henchman with steady gray eyes. Ben Chacherre met the look with almost a trace of defiance. The chief frowned darkly.

"Yes," said the chief. "That's the size of it, Fell. You're keepin' quiet about the name of the real Masquer; why?"

"Because," said Fell, calmly, "I happen to know that he was in the auditorium at the time of the murder."

Again silence. Ben Chacherre stared at Fell, with amazement and admiration in his gaze. "When the master sees, he sees magnificently!" he murmured in French.

"Well," and the chief gestured despairingly, "I guess that lets out the real Masquer, eh?"

"Exactly," assented Fell. "No use dragging his name into it. I'll keep at work on this, chief, and if anything turns up to clear young Maillard, I'll be very glad."

"All right," grunted the chief, and rose. "I'll be on my way."

He departed. Neither Fell nor Chacherre moved or spoke for a space. When at length the clang of the elevator door resounded through the deserted corridors Ben Chacherre slipped from his chair and went to the outer door. He glanced into the hall, closed the door, and with a nod returned to his chair.

"Well!" Ja-rain Fell regarded him with intent, searching eyes. "Have you any light to throw on the occasion?"

Chacherre's usual air of cool impudence was never in evidence when he talked with Mr. Fell.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "Hammond worked on the car until about nine o'clock, then beat it to bed, I guess. I quit the job at ten, and his light had been out some time. Well, master, this is a queer affair! There's no doubt that Gramont pulled it, eh?"

"You think so?" asked Fell.

Chacherre made a gesture of assent. "When the tree falls, the kid can climb it! Any fool can see that Gramont was the man. Don't you think so yourself, master?"

Ja-rain Fell nodded.

"Yes. But we've no evidence—everything lies against young Maillard. Early in the morning Gramont goes to Paradis to examine that land of Miss

Ledanois' along the bayou. He'll probably say nothing of this murder to Hammond, and the chauffeur may not find out about it until a day or two—they get few newspapers down there."

"Drive down to Paradis in the morning, Ben; get late touch with Hammond, and discover what time Gramont got home tonight. Write me what you find out. Then take charge of things at the Gumberts place. Make sure that every car is handled right. A headquarter's man from Mobile will be here tomorrow to trace the Nonpareil Twelve that Gramont now owns."

Chacherre whistled under his breath. "What?"

Ja-rain Fell smiled slightly and nodded. "Yes, if Gramont remains at Paradis, I may send him on down there—I'm not sure yet. I intend to get something on that man Hammond."

"But you can't land him that way, master! He bought the car—"

"And who sold the car to the ga-

rage people? They bought it innocently." A peculiar smile twisted Fell's lips away. "In fact, they bought it from a man named Hammond, as the evidence will show very clearly."

Ben Chacherre started, since he had sold that car himself. Then a slow grin came into his thin features—a grin that widened into a noiseless laugh.

"Master, you are magnificent!" he said, and rose. "Well, if there is nothing further on hand, I shall go to bed."

"An excellent program," said Ja-rain Fell, and took his hat from the desk. "I must get some sleep myself."

They left the office and the building together.

Three hours afterward the dawn had set in—a cold, gray and dismal dawn that rose upon a city littered with the aftermath of carnival. "Lean Wednesday" it was, in sober fact.

Thus far, the city in general was ignorant of the tragedy which had taken place at the very conclusion of its gayest carnival season. Within a few hours business and social circles would be swept by the fact of Joseph Maillard's murder, but at this early point of the day the city slept.

The morning papers, which today carried a news story that promised to shock and stun the entire community, were not yet distributed.

Rising before daylight, Henry Gramont and Hammond breakfasted early and were off by six in the car. They were well outside town and sweeping on their way to Terrebonne parish and the town of Paradis before they realized that the day was not going to brighten appreciably. Instead, it remained very cloudy and gloomy, with a chill threat of rain in the air.

Weather mattered little to Gramont. When finally the excellent highway was left behind, and they started on the last lap of their seventy-mile ride, they found the parish roads execrable and the going slow. Thus, noon was at hand when they at length pulled into Paradis, the town closest to Lucie Ledanois' bayou land. The rain was still holding off.

"Too cold to rain," observed Gramont. "Let's hit for the hotel and get something to eat. I'll have to locate the land, which is somewhere near town."

They discovered the hotel to be an ancient structure, and boasting prices worthy of Lafayette and his buccaneers. As in many small towns of Louisiana, however, the food proved fit for a king. After a light luncheon of quail, crayfish bisque, and probably illegal venison, Gramont sighed regret that he could eat no more, and set about inquiring where the Ledanois farm lay.

There was very little, indeed, to Paradis, which lay on the bayou but well away from the railroad. It was a desolate spot, unpainted and unkempt. The parish seat of Houma had robbed it of all life and growth on the one hand; on the other, the new oil and gas district had not yet touched it.

Southward lay the swamp—fully forty miles off, merging by degrees into the Gulf. Forty miles of cypress marsh and winding bayou, uncharted, unexplored save by occasional hunters or semi-occasional sheriffs. No man knew who or what might be in those swamps, and no one cared to know.

The man who brought in fish or oysters in his skiff might be a bayou fisherman, and he might be a murderer wanted in ten states. Curiosity was apt to prove extremely unhealthy. Like the Atchafalaya, where chance travelers find themselves abruptly ordered elsewhere, the Terrebonne swamps have their own secrets and know how to keep them.

Gramont had no difficulty in locating the Ledanois land, and he found that it was by no means in the swamp. A part of it, lying closer to Houma, had been sold and was now included in the new oil district; it was this portion which Joseph Maillard had sold off.

The remainder, and the largest portion, lay north of Paradis and ran along the west bank of the bayou for half a mile. A long-abandoned farm, it was high ground, with the timber well cleared off and excellently located; but tenants were hard to get and shiftless when obtained, so that the place had not been farmed for the last five years or more. After getting these facts, Gramont consulted with Hammond.

"We'd better buy some grub here in town and arrange to stay a couple of nights on the farm, if necessary," he said. "There are some buildings there, so we'll find shelter. Along the bayou are summer cottages—I believe some of them rather pretentious places—and we ought to find the road pretty decent. It's only three or four miles out of town."

With some provisions piled in the car, they set forth. The road wound along the bayou side, past ancient Cajun farms and the squat homes of fishermen. Here and there had been placed camps and summer cottages, nestling amid groups of huge oaks and cypress, whose fronds of silver-gray moss hung in drooping clusters like pale and ghostly shrouds.

Watching the road closely, Gramont suddenly found the landmarks that had been described to him, and ordered Hammond to stop and turn in at a gap in the fence which had once been an entrance gate.

"Here we are! These are the buildings off to the right. Whew! I should say it had been abandoned! Nothing much left but ruins. Go ahead!"

Before them, as they drove in from the road by a grass-covered drive, showed a house, shed, and barn amid

a cluster of towering trees. Indeed, trees were everywhere about the farm, which had grown up in a regular sapling forest. The buildings were in a ruinous state—clapboards hanging loosely, roofs dotted by gaping holes, doors and windows long since gone.

Leaving the car, Gramont, followed by the chauffeur, went to the front doorway and surveyed the wreckage inside.

"What do you say, Hammond? Think we can stop here, or go back to the hotel? It's not much of a run to town."

Hammond pointed to a white fire-place facing them.

"I can get this shack cleaned out in about half an hour—this one room, anyhow. When we get a fire going in there, and board up the windows and doors, we ought to be comfortable enough. But suit yourself, cap'n! It's your funeral."

Gramont laughed. "All right. Go ahead and clean up, then, and if rain comes down we can camp here. Be sure and look for snakes and vermin. The floor seems sound, and if there's

plenty of moss on the trees, we can make up comfortable beds. Too bad you're not a fisherman, or we might get a fresh fish out of the bayou."

"I got some tackle in town," and Hammond grinned widely.

"Good work! Then make yourself at home and go to it. We've most of the afternoon before us."

Gramont left the house, and headed down toward the bayou shore.

He took a letter from his pocket, opened it, and glanced over it anew. It was an old letter, one written him nearly two years previously by Lucie Ledanois. It had been written merely in the endeavor to distract the thoughts of a wounded soldier, to bring his mind to Louisiana, away from the stricken fields of France. In the letter Lucie had described some of the more interesting features of Bayou Terrebonne—the oyster and shrimp fleets, the Chinese and Filipino villages along the gulf, the far-spreading cypress swamps, the bubbling fountains, natural curiosities, that broke up through the streams and bayous of the whole wide parish—fountains that were caused by gas seeping up from the earth's interior, and breaking through.

Gramont knew that plans were already afoot to tap this field of natural gas and pipe it to New Orleans. Oil had been found, too, and all the state was now oil-mad. Fortunes were being made daily, and other fortunes were being lost daily by those who dealt with oil stocks instead of with oil.

"Those gas fountains did the work," reflected Gramont. "And according to this letter there's one of those fountains here in the bayou, close to her property. Just opposite the dock," she says. The first thing is to find the dock, then the fountain. After that, we'll decide if it's true mineral gas. If it is, then the work's done—for I'll sure take a chance on finding oil near it!"

Gramont came to the bayou and began searching his way along the thick and high fringe of bushes and maples that girded the water's edge. Presently he came upon the ruined evidences of what had once been a small boat shed. Not far from this he found the dock referred to in the letter; nothing was left of it except a few spiles protruding from the surface of the water. But he had no need to look farther. Directly before him, he saw that which he was seeking.

A dozen feet out from shore the water was rising and falling in a continuous dome or fountain of highly charged bubbles that rose a foot above the surface. Gramont stared at it, motionless. He watched it for a space—then, abruptly, he started. It was a violent start, a start of sheer amazement and incredulity.

He leaned forward, staring no longer at the gas dome, but at the water closer inshore. For a moment he thought that his senses had deceived him, then he saw that the thing was there indeed, there beyond any doubt—a very faint trace of iridescent light that played over the surface of the water.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Cleaning Hint.

When you're cleaning house sprinkle the clothes closets with a little water in which tobacco has been steeped and then sprinkle with a little spirit of camphor. The latter destroys the odor of the former and together they will prevent annoyance by moths.

## CONFERENCE WORKS OUT PLANS ON THE MARKETING OF LAMBS



Lambs Being Assembled in Big Dipping Yard Pens to Be Sent to the Various Markets.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

Plans for the more orderly marketing of native lambs at Jersey City and New York city, and the elimination of violent fluctuations in prices of live and dressed lambs at these markets, are to be worked out by a committee representing live stock commission men, slaughterers, retailers, railroads, stock yard companies at Jersey City and New York, eastern lamb producers and the United States Department of Agriculture.

This committee was appointed as a result of the conference called recently by the United States Department of Agriculture, at Jersey City. At this conference members of the trade representing the various interests engaged in the handling, marketing, slaughtering and retailing of lambs at Jersey City and New York met representatives of sheep and lamb producers and the department. Practically all the factors responsible for the wide fluctuation in lamb prices at Jersey City during certain periods were brought out by full discussion.

The conference developed the fact that the lamb problem at Jersey City is a production and marketing problem combined, and that its solution lies largely in the hands of the producers and slaughterers of native lambs, although live stock commission men and retail meat dealers can assist in remedying the situation.

Occupies Key Position.

Jersey City occupies a key position in the channel of distribution between the lamb producers and the largest center of consumption, inasmuch as it is the final public concentration point for live lambs destined for New York city, the greatest consuming center for dressed lamb in the United States and a market that requires a high-grade product.

It was shown that ordinarily Jersey City has a reputation of being the highest lamb market in the country, but that during June, July and August it suffers violent price fluctuations because of the big increase in receipts of native lambs from Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Michigan and New York, without any material decrease in the supply of live and dressed lambs received there and at New York city from Western points. The situation is complicated by the marked irregularity in the volume of the daily receipts during those months and by the inferior quality of the offerings, most of which arrive unsorted and ungraded.

It was brought out that the poor quality of these lambs is due largely to the failure of producers to use better breeding stock and proper feeding methods and to dock and castrate their lambs at the proper time. The fact that native lambs in so many instances become infected in the summer months with diseases of parasitic origin, particularly stomach worms, makes it very important that they be marketed before the milk fat disappears.

These lambs usually are dropped at a period which requires that they be marketed during the months of June, July and August, hence they are a perishable produce from a marketing standpoint. When they reach Jersey City in larger numbers than the demand can absorb, and come in competition with the high-grade live and dressed Western lambs, prices break sharply and affect the lamb market generally at all points. Declines in the dressed market often are more drastic than those in the live market.

Better Breeding Stock Urged.

It was agreed at the conference that producers of native lambs should use better breeding stock; supply ample feed both to the ewes and lambs for maximum gains in order to market the lambs before they become infested with parasites, and practice docking and castration.

It was agreed, also, that producers in the different areas should reach an understanding which will lead to the lengthening of the breeding and marketing period, and that they should cooperate in their marketing in such a way as will insure grading and sorting in the country and more orderly movement of lambs to market. In this connection it was suggested that the practice which appears to be generally followed in certain states of contracting lambs to country buyers for

delivery during stated periods is largely responsible for the irregularity in the daily receipts at Jersey City. If shippers would consign some of their lambs, particularly the lower grades, to other markets, where there is a better outlet, it would do much towards remedying the undesirable conditions at Jersey City and New York. Feeding stations established in the East as reservoirs from which to feed the market as supplies are needed also were mentioned as a means for remedying conditions.

Producers and commission men recommended that local and Western slaughterers co-operate by endeavoring to reduce the volume of their direct shipments and their shipments of Western dressed lambs to Jersey City and New York from Middle Western markets at periods when glut are known to occur, in order to insure a supply no greater than the demand. It was also suggested that live stock commission men advise their patrons as to when gluts usually occur and when there are good reasons to believe one will occur, explaining fully what happens when undesirable and ungraded lambs are sent to the Jersey City market.

It was recommended that retailers feature lamb in their advertising and selling efforts during the period of excessive receipts and give consumers advantage of recessions in wholesale prices. Any steps taken along this line would encourage consumption and tend to check price fluctuations.

Personnel of Committee.

Although the movement of native lambs to market will soon be completed for the current year, the conference was unanimous in its desire to work out plans immediately which will insure more orderly marketing and less price fluctuation. The following committee was appointed to work to this end with representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture:

H. K. Nickell, United Dressed Beef company, New York; L. S. Joseph, vice president New York Butchers' Dressed Meat company, New York; George Kramer, United Master Butchers of America, New York; H. D. Wiener, Pennsylvania Railroad company, Philadelphia; George A. Shannon, vice president New York and New Jersey Live Stock association, Jersey City; J. H. Meek, chief, bureau of markets, Richmond, Va., and R. C. Bonham, president and general manager Jersey City stock yards, Jersey City.

FORECASTS INCREASE PROFITS ON ALFALFA

Growers in West Receive Predictions Through Agents.

Seed is Largely Grown From Second Crop and if Season is Late Frost and Harvest Periods Come Close Together.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

Forecasts of weather conditions for alfalfa harvest are widely distributed in the West, particularly in Oklahoma, where 2,000 or more growers receive the forecasts through the local agents of the extension service of the United States Department of Agriculture. In Utah a rather limited but important frost-warning service for alfalfa seed growers is in operation.

Seed is largely grown from the second crop, and if the season is late the harvest and fall frost periods come close together. As the seed crop increases in value at the rate of about \$5 a day for each acre of seed when nearing maturity, the growers let the seed stand as long as possible. When temperatures low enough to cause damage are predicted by the weather bureau it is not unusual for the seed growers to run their cutting machines most of the night.

In one section of Utah during a recent harvest season fully 500 acres of seed were cut after receipt of the warnings, at an average saving of \$30 to \$300 an acre. Two of these growers reported that they saved at least \$2,000 as a result of the weather information furnished by Uncle Sam concerning frost conditions.

## Rheumatism and Dyspepsia Are Soon Ended

Victims of stomach trouble and rheumatism often find that when their stomach is set in order, the rheumatism disappears. Thousands of people everywhere have testified that Tanase has freed them of both troubles simultaneously. Mr. Robert Trotter, 148 State St., St. Paul, Minn., says:

"About a year ago I began to go down hill. Sour stomach and rheumatism in my arms and shoulders kept me in misery all the time. Since taking Tanase all my aches and pains have gone, and my stomach is in fine shape. I'm glad to endorse such a fine medicine."

Badly digested food fills the whole system with poisons. Rheumatism and many other complaints not generally recognized as having their origin in the stomach quickly respond to the right treatment. Get a bottle today at any good druggist.—Advertisement.

Whadmean, "Absent Minded?"

"Flappers in Floppers" is as neat a headline as we've seen this season. By the way, a correspondent wrote us the following, which he found in the writings of Jonathan Swift: "Absent-minded people always kept a flapper in the family as one of the domestics."

—Boston Transcript.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Read This Letter from Mrs. W. S. Hughes

Greenville, Del.—"I was under the impression that my oldest daughter had some internal trouble from overeating since the first time her sickness appeared she had to go to bed and even had to quit school once for a week. I always take Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound myself as I gave it to her and she has received great benefit from it. You can use this letter for a testimonial if you wish, as I cannot say too much about what your medicine has done for me and for my daughter."—Mrs. W. S. Hughes, Greenville, Delaware.

Mothers and oftentimes grandmothers have taken and have learned the value of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. No they recommend the medicine to others.

The best test of any medicine is what it has done for others. For nearly fifty years we have published letters from mothers, daughters, and women, young and old, recommending the Vegetable Compound. They know what it did for them and are glad to tell others. In your own neighborhood are women who know of its great value.

Mothers—daughters, why not try it!

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